



PRESS RELEASE
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For Immediate Release

March 6, 2007

ORLANDO MAN SENTENCED TO 14 MONTHS'

IMPRISONMENT FOR FEMA FRAUD

Orlando, Florida - U.S. District Judge John Antoon, II today sentenced WALTER WASHINGTON, 27, of Orlando, Florida to fourteen months' imprisonment and ordered him to pay \$8,000 in restitution to the Federal Emergency Management Agency ("FEMA") for his involvement in FEMA fraud for Hurricanes Katrina and Rita. The sentence also calls for WASHINGTON to serve three years on supervised release and pay \$400 in special assessments.

WASHINGTON was arrested on November 16, 2006. On December 14, 2006, WASHINGTON pled guilty to four counts of theft of government property. According to court documents, eleven claims were submitted in WASHINGTON's name to FEMA for disaster assistance for Hurricane Katrina and Hurricane Rita. In those applications, it was falsely represented that WASHINGTON had been a resident of Louisiana at the time of Hurricane Katrina or Hurricane Rita and that WASHINGTON was eligible for disaster assistance from FEMA.

In reliance on those misrepresentations, FEMA sent four United States Treasury checks made payable to WASHINGTON for “disaster assistance” that WASHINGTON then cashed. Each check was in the amount of \$2,000. WASHINGTON cashed those four checks despite the fact that he has lived in Florida his whole life and that he was not eligible for any “disaster assistance” for Hurricane Katrina or Hurricane Rita.

WASHINGTON is one of thirty individuals who have been charged to date in Operation “Storm Chaser” that is aimed at detecting and prosecuting instances of fraud in Central Florida related to Hurricanes Katrina and Rita. Twenty-six of those individuals were charged in May 2006. The other four were charged in October and November of 2006. To date, twenty-six of the thirty defendants have been sentenced. Thirteen, including WASHINGTON, have been sentenced to prison terms. The other thirteen individuals have been sentenced to probation. Each defendant who has been sentenced has been ordered to re-pay FEMA for the amounts that they stole.

These cases are part of the effort by the Hurricane Katrina Fraud Task Force to prosecute disaster-related crimes from last year’s hurricanes. The Task Force was created in September 2005 by Attorney General Alberto R. Gonzales to deter, investigate, and prosecute federal crimes arising from Hurricanes Katrina and Rita. The Hurricane Katrina Fraud Task Force – chaired by Assistant Attorney General Alice S. Fisher of the Criminal Division, includes members of the Secret Service, the Postal Inspector’s Office, and the Executive Office for United States Attorneys, among others.

These case were investigated by the United States Secret Service, the United States Postal Inspection Service, and the Department of Homeland Security Office of Inspector General, with assistance from the U.S. Marshal’s Service. The cases are being prosecuted by Assistant United States Attorney Roger B. Handberg.